

Georgi Atanasov



TRACIAN ROCK CULT
CENTER ON THE
RIVER TABAN, SILISTRA
„THE SACRED VALLEY OF ZALMOCSIS“



Rock marbles near the sanctuary by the village Kutlovitsa.

Georgi Atanasov

Tracian rock cult center on the river Taban, Silistra

„The Sacred valley of Zalmocsis”

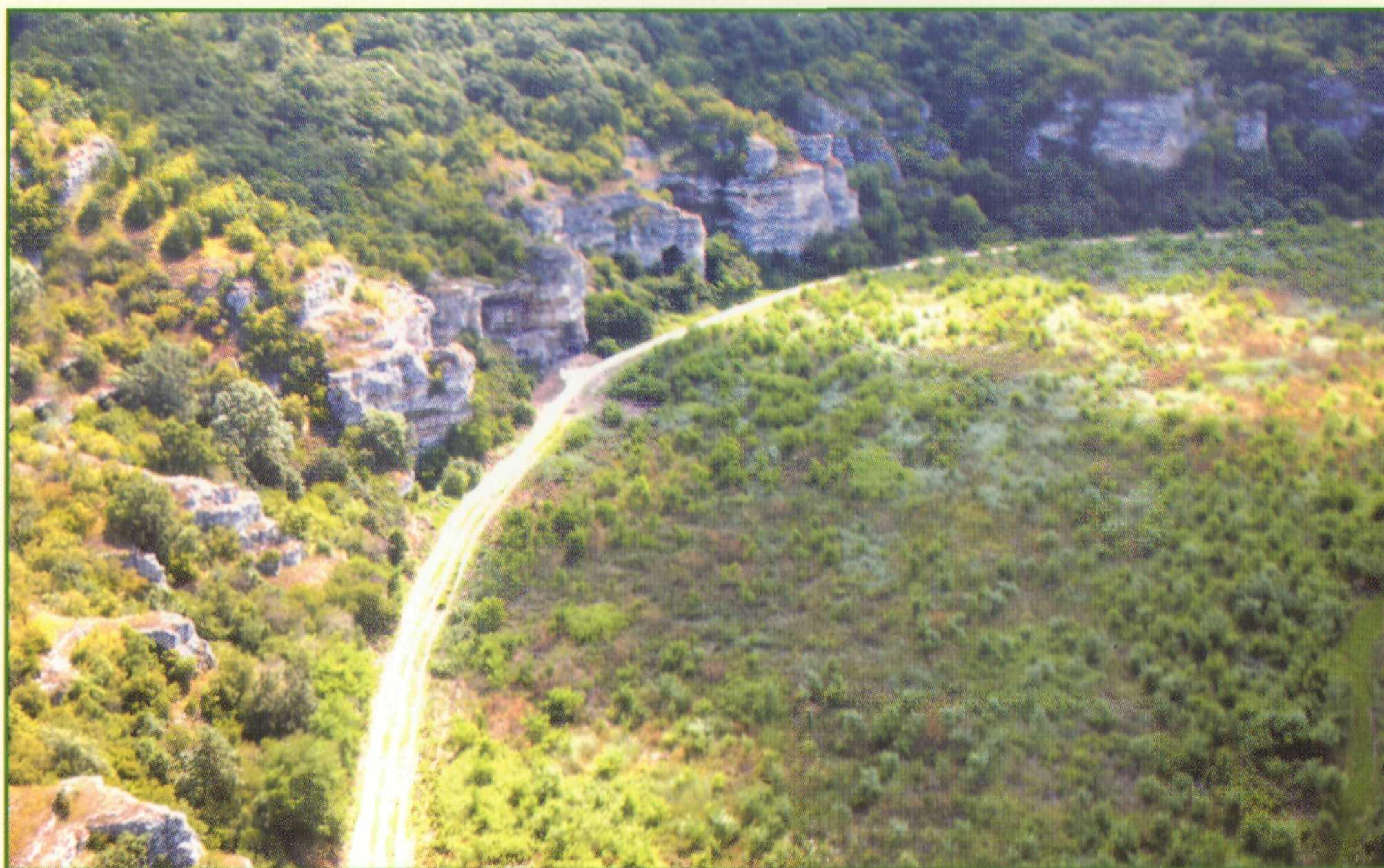


Silistra 2006

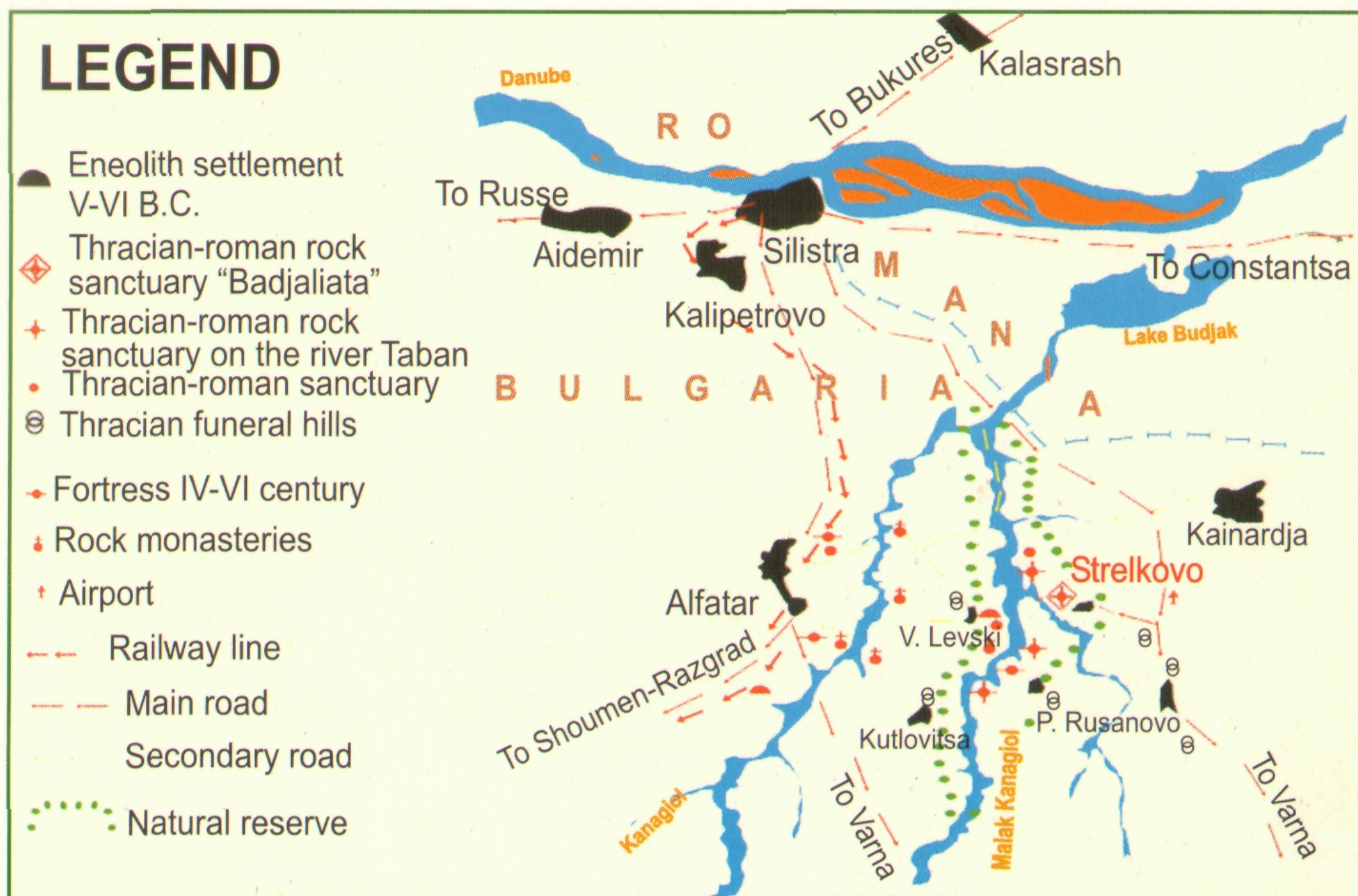
More than 20 years ago on the dry river valley of the Taban river, which appears to be the natural border between the municipalities of Kainardja and Alfatar in the district of Silistra, a curious rock cult complex has been registered. It includes rock sanctuaries, alters, cult platforms along 4 km of the shores of the ancient river Taban (Malak Kanagiol) in the region of the villages Strelkovo, Vasil Levski, Pop Rusanovo and Kutlovitsa (sample 2). In the summer of 2005 drilling archeological excavations have been made of the most significant of the rock sanctuaries on the Taban, called "Badjaliata". This furthers to a great degree for specifying the dating and making more exact the elements fo the cult practices.

THE DRY VALLEY OF TABAN. THE HISTORY OF AN ANCIENT RIVER

The unvaried Dobroudja plain, which marks the end of the large eurasian forest-steppe is divested by the picturesque valleys of several half dried rivers. The most impressing and expressively notable on the terrain of South Dobroudja are The Dry river, Kanagiol (Dristra), Taban (also called on the lower downstream Harsovska, and on the upstream Malak Kanagiol) with the adjoining feeders (sample 1, 2). All dry river valleys have their beginning from the Fore-Balkan, cross the forest-steppe of Dobroudja and flow into the river Danube through the lakes Garlitsa (Budjak) and Oltina in the Romanian territory. Hence, there are facts, which witness, that in the Middle Ages up to the XVIII century Taban and Kanagiol were still fluent rivers.



Sample 1. The dry river valley of Taban from "bird's eye".



Sample 2. The rock Thracian and archeological monuments on the rivers Taban and Karagiol .

Describing the campaign of her father, the Emperor Alexy Komnin, to Drastar in 1088, the famous Byzantine author and intellectual Anna Komnina leaves us a summarized and poetical description of Dobroudja. At that time has been known under the name "A hundred hills" (ought to the numerous Thracian funeral hills", through which "...*big and beautiful rivers flow*" (A. Comnenae. Alexias, VII, 3). Even more important is the statement, that by his removal from Pliska to Drastar "...*The autocrat (Emperor Alexy Komnin) moved near a river, which flows not far from Dristra (Silistra)*". After we already know, that the medieval road Preslav-Pliska-Drastar is in direct nearness to the river-bed of Kanagiol and Taban, so probably these are the rivers, near which Alexy Komnin moved in 1088. Considerably later, in 1790, but totally concrete, the French diplomat and traveler Felix Boujoure reported about a river near Silistra, feeder of the Danube: "...*The fifth road comes from Silistra, going up the stream of Dristra or the feeder Taban to their springs, which are the first fore-mountains of the Balkan*". Apart of the written sources the present dry river valleys Kanagiol and Taban are fixed with their own names as small rivers in the geographic maps from the XVIII and the beginning of the XIX century (sample 3).



Sample 3. Map sheet 14 from the atlas of Fr. Reilly, published in Vienna in 1791.

The ancient rivers definitely give the optimum life conditions in the otherwise poor of water sources and disposed to dryness Dobroudja steppe. One of the earliest stationary settlements in the epoch of the eneolithic in Silistra area was situated not far from the left shore of the dry valley of Taban, 2 km southeastern from the village V. Levski in the area "Paradjik" (sample 2). The fragments of utensils, rock axes and tools, found on the terrain, illustrate habitation as late as the fifth or even the fourth millennium B.C. In the region there are rarely registered monuments from the Bronze Age, but in the Halstead we observe a true demographic blast, connected with the appearances of the Thracian. They reclaim the region of the river Taban, for which two settlements witness. One is on the left shore, southeastern from the village Vasil Levski and the second is on the northern shore on the first not flooded terrace, at about 3 km northwestern from the village Pop Rusanovo. It is situated on a cape-like height on the right shore of Taban, at about 3 km southern from the "Badjaliata" and it is in a direct neighborhood to the second in size rock sanctuary "Kirindjika". Without any doubt the Thracian settlements and the sanctuaries are associated with the two big hill necropolis. The first is located on the high plain terrace between the dry river valleys of Taban and Kanagiol, as there is the largest concentration of funeral hills in the region –

between the villages Kutlovitsa and Vasil Levski. The second necropolis, far more impressive in number and size of the hills, is located parallelly with the road Silistra – Sredishte – Varna (samples 2, 34). It is remarkable, that its beginning is above the rock sanctuaries on the Taban and continues at about 40 km in southeast, where it covers one of the highest terraces above the Danube in Dobroudja. Finally, we have to define, that the life in the Thracian settlements on the Taban river continued also in the Antiquity.

THE CAVE IN THE ANCIENT MYTHOLOGIES. THE CAVES ON THE TABAN RIVER.

The dry rivers are deeply indented in the ancient sarmath limestones – sedimentary rocks, which lead their beginning from the prehistoric Sarmath sea – i.e. 50 – 60 000 years ago. Solely around the dry valleys (the ancient rivers) remain the limestones visible. About the time of the Ice and Between-ice-age periods their courses have been finally formed and varied with scores of caves and rock marbles. Solely by the valley of Taban over 40 big and hundreds of smaller caves have been charted. Some of them like “Kirindjika” and “Galabtshishkata” (between the villages Vasil Levski, Pop Rusanovo and Kutlovitsa) with their halls, tunnels and galleries belong to the biggest and most attractive in Dobroudja. There are relatively young formations, act of the geologically chemical processes by the forming of the Karst and the underground springs, that flew in to the once deep land rivers. These natural



Sample 4. The valley to the “Badjaliata”.

phenomena are definitely outlined on the ground of the unvaried steppe and this provokes the curiosity of its inhabitants since high antiquity. Altogether, ancient people, stood with respect and excitement in front of the mysterious world of the cave. They assumed it as something inner, hidden and secret, as an original mystic border between the worlds of visible and invisible. In the Greek–hellenic, Thracian and eastern mythologies the cave is a sacred shelter of gods and heroes, that has given home to Zeus baby himself. In this sense the cave can be considered as a real natural temple of the gods, even a prototype of the constructed Greek–hellenic and Thracian temples. It is not an accident, that just like the cave, their interior is hidden from the sights of the congregation, because it is an occupation of the deity itself. A limited access to the bosom of the sanctuary had only the god chosen priests, who sacrificed victims on the alters and did cult ceremonies.

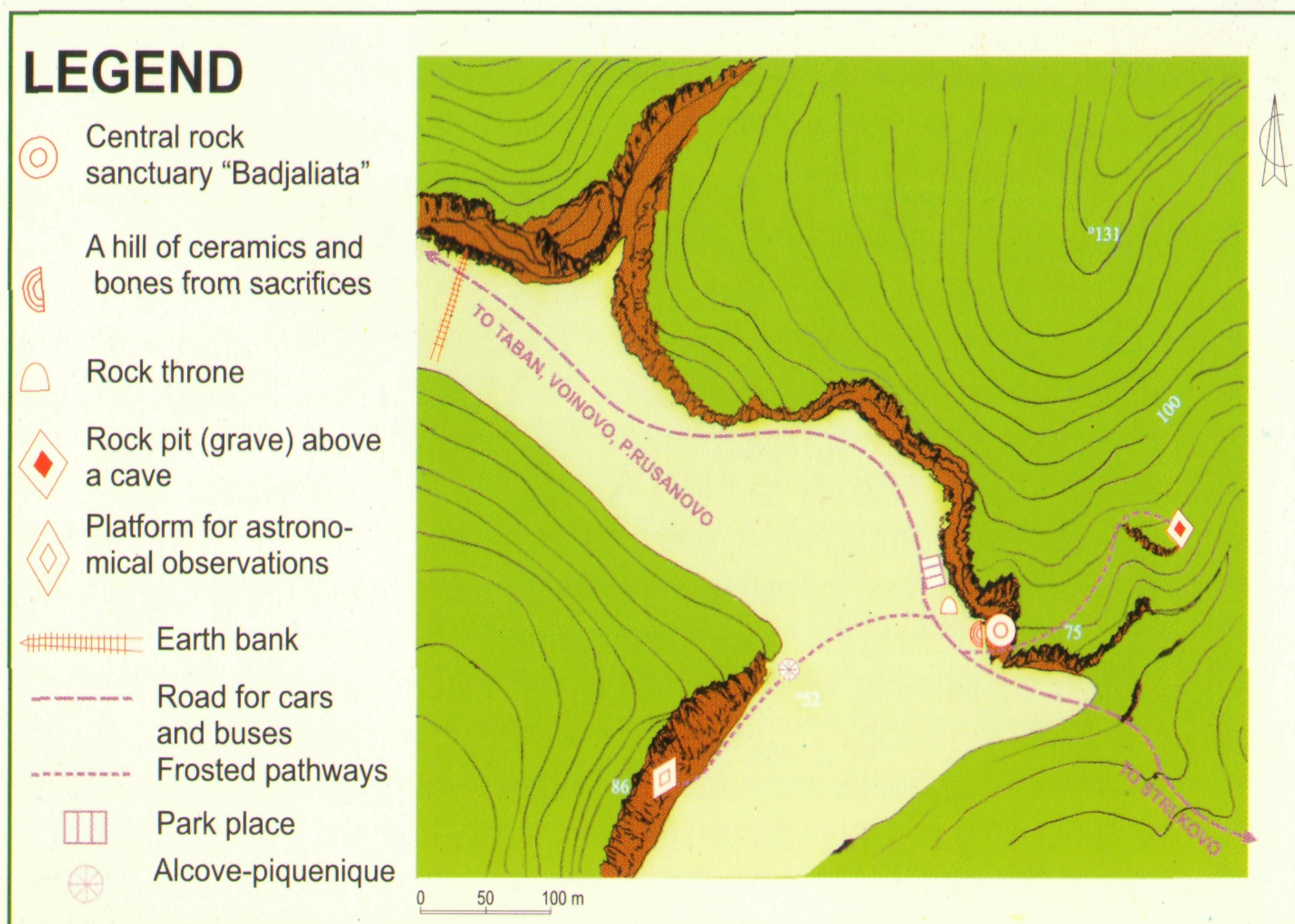


Sample 5. Caves on the downstream of Taban.

THE ROCK TEMPLE "BADJALIATA"

Probably the big cave "Badjaliata" (samples 6–8) is initially accepted as a not made by human hand divine temple and in this quality here were done cult actions and mysteries since high antiquity. In the earliest cultural layer at the foot of the sanctuary single finds and ceramics from the Stone–Copper Age have been found, which assumes deifying of this place more than 5000 years ago. It is remarkable, that the first stationary settlement in the region, situated only 2 km western in the direction of the village Vasil Levski, also dates from the Stone–Copper Age.

As a result of the strati–graphical archeological research of the cultural stratifications in the foot of "Badjaliata" the topographic succession is traced in the cult rationalization of this remarkable natural fact. The first inhabitants from the Epoch of the eneolith found and gave this place holiness, but with the end of their civilization throughout a millennium the rocks and caves remained forgotten. Single ceramic fragments and bronze ornaments assume a rediscovery of this remarkable place in the late Bronze Age. But its real cultural adoption dates about the VI–V B. C. The Sacred valley by the middle river–bed of the Taban is once again deified by the Thracian, who

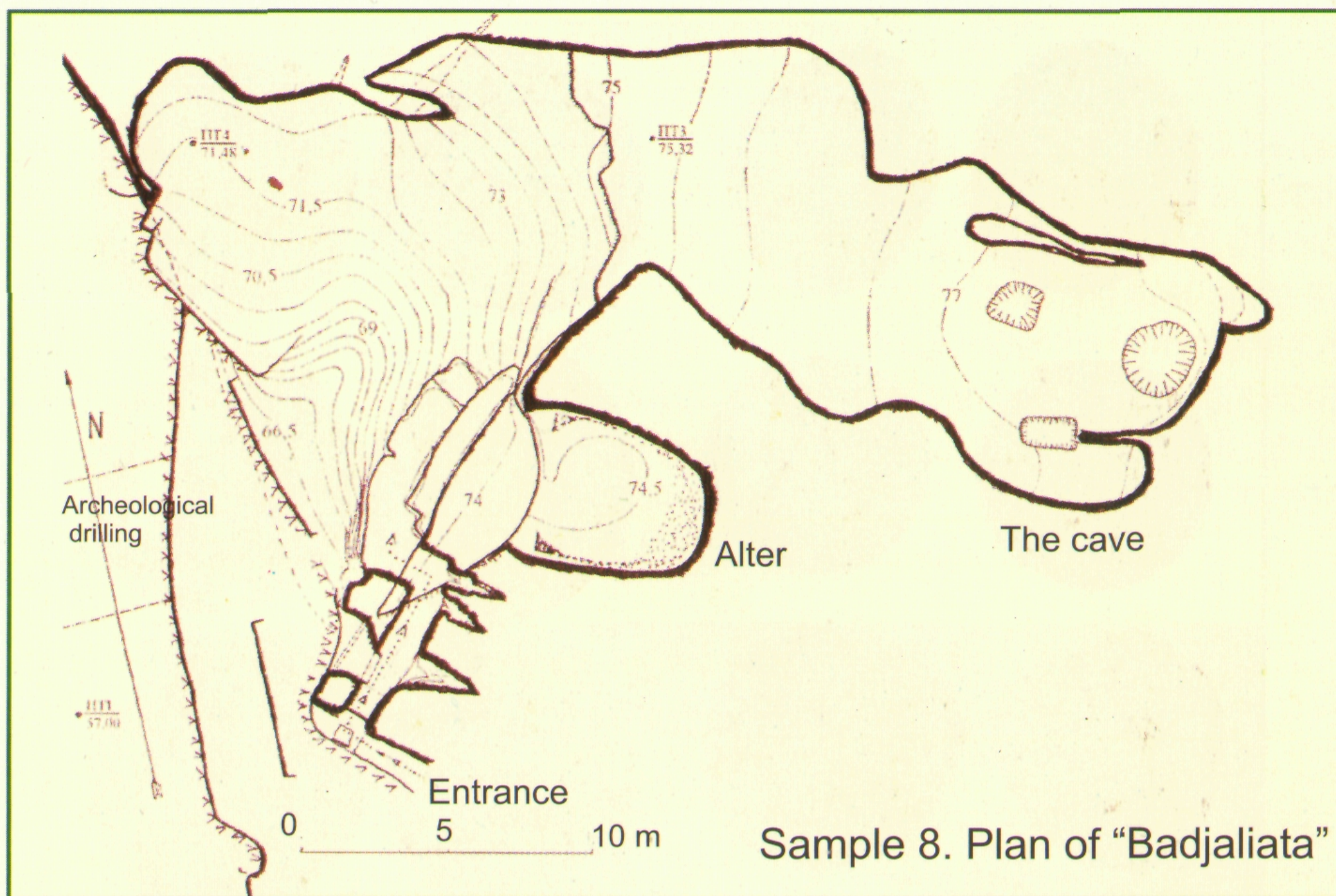


Sample 6. Plan of the valley under "Badjaliata" near the village Strelkovo with the concomitant archeological structures.



Sample 7. A view to “Badjaliata” and the archeological drilling in its foot.

lay the beginning of a real rock cult construction. Naturally the expunged plain around the ancient river, bordered by rock garlands and caves, is limited by a bank and so the sacred Γ -formed territory temenos is framed (sample 6, 16). Approximately in its center remains the big natural cave “Badjaliata”, which rises above the high right shore of the dry river valley, branch of Taban (sample 7, 8). From the foot to the rock garland a pathway is cut, which expands and lays horizontally by the approach to the rock structures. It leads to a natural tunnel, which marks the beginning of the rock sanctuary (sample 8, 16). The grooves, formed by the entrance witness, that the tunnel has been closed by a door anchored in the rock wooden (sample 17). The Γ -formed gallery leads to a horizontally cut pathway, which leads to a large natural cave with measurements 18,80 x 8,50 x 7,60 m. (Sample 7, 8). Near the entrance of the cave a cultural horizon has been registered with ceramics and traces of a fireplace. Here have been found 7 silver drachmas, cut in Istria and three Roman republic dinars from the I–II A.C. (Sample 9). On the right in the cave is the most thoroughly cut room in the complex – a deep elliptical in section and half-elliptical in plan alter (measurements: width 5,15 m, depth 6,00 m and height 2,00 – 3,20 m), the floor of which is perfectly even (sample 7, 8, 19).



Sample 8. Plan of "Badjaliata"

In its foot the rock pathway is winded and so an original platform is formed. Under it a 20 m deep abyss is revealed, which reaches the level of the dry river valley. Here as a result of the centuries-old sacrifices on the platform in front of the alter of the rock temple in the lowland a cultural layer is piled up with a diameter of about 22 m. And depth between 1.70 m (near the rock) and 3.30 m (in the lowland). Here an archeological drilling has been set with a width of 5 m (sample 7, 8, 20)*.

Chronologically the earliest monuments are from the Stone-Copper and the Bronze Age (sample 23), but the most compact complex of artifacts is the Halstatt and the Laten. The Thracian ceramics in particular is in a high quantity and is about 90% of the ceramic ensemble. Remarkable is the presence of Hellenic black varnish utensils and amphoras (some with seals) from the Aegean basin (samples 23, 24). The upper horizons are saturated with roman ceramics (sample 25), which dates in the borders from the II – IV century. In the cultural stratifications latent fibulas were found, as also fragments of Thracian ornaments (two bracelets) and ten coins, among which the obolus of Philippe II of Macedonia (359–336), drachmas and tetra drachmas of Alexander III (The Great) of Macedonia (336–323 B.C.), Lizimah (321–281 B.C.),

*The excavations are done in 2005 under the guidance of Dr. D. Gergova and Dr. G. Atanasov. The publishing of the results is at hand



Sample 9. Coins from and under “Badjaliata” 1,2. Philippe I; 3,4,5. Alexander the Great; 6. Lizimah; 7. Selevk; 8. Istria; 9. Republican dinar; 10. Constantine the Great.

Selevk (312–280 B.C.), Thracian imitations of the drachmas of Alexander of Macedonia, coins of Odessos (IV–III B.C.), dinars of the Roman Republic from the I–II century A.C., and coins Roman Emperor from III–IV A.C., as the latest are those of Constantine The Great (306–337) (sample 9).

THE ROCK THRONE

In the foot, at about 50 m northwestern from "Badjaliata" there is a big rock block with measures 4,40 x 4,10 m, which rises at about 2.00 m above the present terrain (samples 10, 27). It probably broke off as late as the prehistorical times from the rock garland (it is fixed in at a depth of 4 m from the present terrain) and ever since the antiquity it has been manipulated in addition. It has been cut under the form of a throne with a seat 0.37 m high, 0.60 m wide and a back 0.70 m high and it is in a straight visual connection with the altar of the sanctuary (samples 6, 10, 20, 27). At 32 m in front of it begin the cultural lodgements in the foot of "Badjaliata". Here has been found a Thracian fibule and a coin of the Emperor Elgabal (218–222 A.C.).



Sample 10. The throne under "Badjaliata"

THE ROCK CULT PLATFORM

220 m southwestern from "Badjaliata" the left shore of the dry river valley is bordered by second limestone garland, in which natural caves and sunshades are registered. A cap-formed rock 13 m high have been moved out from it to the dry river valley (samples 6, 11, 28). Its peak is thoroughly cut, and as a result it is perfectly even. In this way a platform in trapezium-shaped form has been made, oriented by the world directions with a maximum length of 4.10 m and a maximum width of 2.70 m. Exactly in the middle a deep channel with a width of 0,15 m and a depth of 0,40 m has been cut. It is

oriented north–south with a 8° diversion to the West. In the center of the channel a nest has been additionally fixed, probably for mooring a wooden strut (sample 28). From the platform a wide view is revealed and a direct visual connection is established with the alter of the “Badjaliata”, the throne, the hill necropolis (on the peak of the high plateau by the road Silistra–Varna) and the third rock garland in northeastern direction. On the last one a fourth stationary archeological structure has been explored.



Sample 11. Astronomical platform opposite of “Badjaliata”.

THE ROCK CULT PIT

It is situated 150 m northeastern from “Badjalata” and is located over a small cave (sample 6, 12, 29). From the cave’s entrance by steppes, which have been cut in the rock, one can reach a not large rock platform, which is additionally raked. On it, right above the cave a rock pit with rectangular neck with measurements $1,25 \times 1,00$ m has been cut. It is oriented by the directions of the world, where the longer side is by the direction north–south with a diversion 10° to the east. The walls to the bottom are slant and it is in depth of 1,20 m with measurements $0,95 \times 0,75$ m. 5 m southeastern of the pit there are four smaller pits, in which probably a wooden construction had been

moored. In the foot of the rock garland a thorough cutting of a platform is registered, but probably the building process is not finished. In the shallow cultural horizon around the pit a fibula, application and decoration from a quiver for a bow have been found (sample 11).

Sample 12. The cult pit above "Badjaliata".



THE ROCK SANCTUARY "KIRINDJIKI"

2.5 m southern from "Badjaliata" on the right shore of the river Taban a large natural cave, called "Kirindjika" is situated (samples 1, 14, 21, 31). Under an impressive rock awning in the base of a Karst garland a huge room is situated with measurements 9 x 7 x 4,5 m. In the eastern half at 1.05 m over the floor diligently a rectangular platform has been formed with measurements 4,10 x 2,80 m. It is oriented by the directions of the world, where the longer side is in the direction north-south with a diversion of 12° to the east. On the western periphery a channel is cut with a width of 0,24 m and a depth of 0.08 m (samples 26, 32). In the center and in the northwestern part of the platform stains are to be seen, that are plastered up with yellow clay and are roughly heated.

To the right of the platform, in the foot of the eastern wall of the rock garland there is a diligently cut semicircle, arch-like formed niche-alter with a width of 2,30 m, depth of 1.30 m and height of 1,85 m. (samples. 32, 33). It is oriented to the east with a small diversion to the north.

To the right, over the alter, on the edge of the rock garland, at the very peak of the plateau begins the third rock structure. By a long, narrow, slanting gallery 0,90 x 0,80 x 6,50 m, one can reach a vertical shaft with depth of 5,50 m. It goes down to a natural cave labyrinth, where the largest and most suitable for habitation is the southwestern part. Here is a wide hole with a view to the dry river valley, and near it, on the northern wall there is a diligently cut small niche-alter with measurements 0,40 x 0,18 x 0,48 m (samples 21, 31).



Sample 13. The sanctuary "Kirindjika" near the village Pop Rusanovo

In the foot of the rock garland, above the shore of the dry river valley a cultural layer is registered, which is saturated with ceramics, which alike this of the Badjaliata dates between the VII–V B.C. till the III–IV A.C.

THE ROCK SANCTUARY NEAR THE VILLAGE KUTLOVITSA

3 km southern from "Kirindjika" and 1.5 km eastern from the village Kutlovitsa the rock sanctuary, which is mostly in south on the river Taban is registered (sample 2, 14). On the right shore of the dry river valley an impressive natural rock arch bridge) is rising with a hole 5,5 x 2,4 m. The cap-like rock above it with sizes around 18 x 8 m has been leveled up through cutting, where in the eastern end two bits, side by side have been carved into. The first is oval-shaped with size 0,40 x 0,28 x 0,50 m, and the second is trough-formed with size 1,40 x 1,00 x 0,60 m. At about 25 km southern from the arch there is a natural rock vesicle, which is additional finished under the form of an elliptical in view and semi-elliptical in plan alter with size 7,60 x 9,10 x 310 m. It is oriented to the east with a diversion of about 12° to the north. Like the other sanctuaries here in the foot of the rocks Thracian and antique ceramics has been also found, but unlike "Badjaliata" and "Kirindjika" the fragments are not many and it lacks of a deep cultural horizon.



Sample 14. The sanctuary near the village Kutlovitsa.

THE ROCK SANCTUARY NEAR THE VILLAGE VASIL LEVSKI

It is located at about 3 km northern from the Badjaliata and like the other three is situated on the right shore of the dry river valley of Taban. This attractive natural



Sample 15. The sanctuary near the village V. Levski.

structure, which looks like a medieval rock castle is modified for a sanctuary (samples 2, 15). For this purpose five natural vesicles on the front elevation of the rock garland have got a final touch through cutting like cult niches.

THE ROCK CULT CENTER BY THE RIVER TABAN IN THE CONTEXT OF THE THRACIAN ROCK SANCTUARIES IN BULGARIA

As a result of archeological excavations and terrain researches it is found out, that the four rock sanctuaries on the river Taban originate and function in the approximately the same time and it is not excluded that they are connected with similar cult practices. Altogether there are proofs of topographic and archeological character, that the single monuments are an integral part of a rock cult complex, whose center is the rock temple "Badjaliata" with the structures by it. Its characteristics are fully addable in the standard characteristics of the Thracian rock sanctuaries in Bulgaria.

I. By their formation a suitable topography and natural facts are wanted: 1. They are located on heights; 2. They are situated near springs and river; 3. They are in close neighborhood with the most remarkable natural rock marbles in the region; 4. The access to them is difficult and usually goes through a steep pathway; 5. To the entrance



Sample 16. "Badjaliata" from "bird's eye".



Sample 17. Entrance to "Badjaliata".

there are serious natural hindrances. This is done deliberately, aiming at "clearance" of the visitors. 6. Sometimes caves are used. Rock marbles are wanted that remind of animal, plant or human forms.

II There is always a human interference, which is usually connected with the cutting of the following elements: 1. Channels and pools for sacrifices; 2. A rock throne, usually oriented (as "Badjaliata") to the south or east; 4. Stairs and a door to the entrance; 5. Steppes, pits, axils and other elements; 6. Forming of rock niches and alters.

As we can see, the two types of characteristics pointed out by V. Naidenova harmonize in full power with the elements in the sanctuaries on the Taban and especially "Badjaliata". According to the

location and the meaning of the rock sanctuaries the author divides them in three types: 1. Small sanctuaries, which like the Christian chapels are isolated and are rarely visited; 2. All time functioning sanctuaries, which serve to a big area and are far from stationary settlements. Here for examples are pointed out Tatul and Mostovo; 3. All Thracian sanctuaries like Perperikon, which function all the time and are an object of mass visits from the Thracian priest. If we take into consideration the cultural stratifications, to the first type we will rank the sanctuaries near the villages Kutlovitsa and V. Levski, and to the second type – the sanctuary in "Kirindjika" can be added, under which there is a homogeneous cultural layer of ceramics, finds and animal bones. We hesitate where we should add the central, biggest and with greatest cultural stratifications sanctuary near "Badjaliata. It definitely has a regional character, but we do not fully exclude the possibility for it to have all-Thracian character.

THE ROCK TEMPLES ON THE RIVER TABAN AND THE CULT TO THE THRACIAN-GETAE GOD ZALMOKSIS

The principal question about the purpose and the cult practices of the rock cult center follows, which for now is unique not only in Dobroudja, but also in the lands of the downstream of the Danube river as a whole. It is almost certain, that the sanctuaries on the river Taban are not connected with the cult to the sun, because none of them is lighted directly by the sun rays and the usual sun disks cut in the rock are missing. This is also confirmed by the archeological-astronomical researches, which are done in 2005 by Dr. Nikolai Dermendjiev. The lack of vow tiles and inscriptions in the sanctuaries and the examined cultural horizons in the foot of "Badjaliata" and finally the lack of similar discovered and clarified installations additionally make the interpretation of the monuments more difficult. This imposes a certain hypothetic in the arguments.

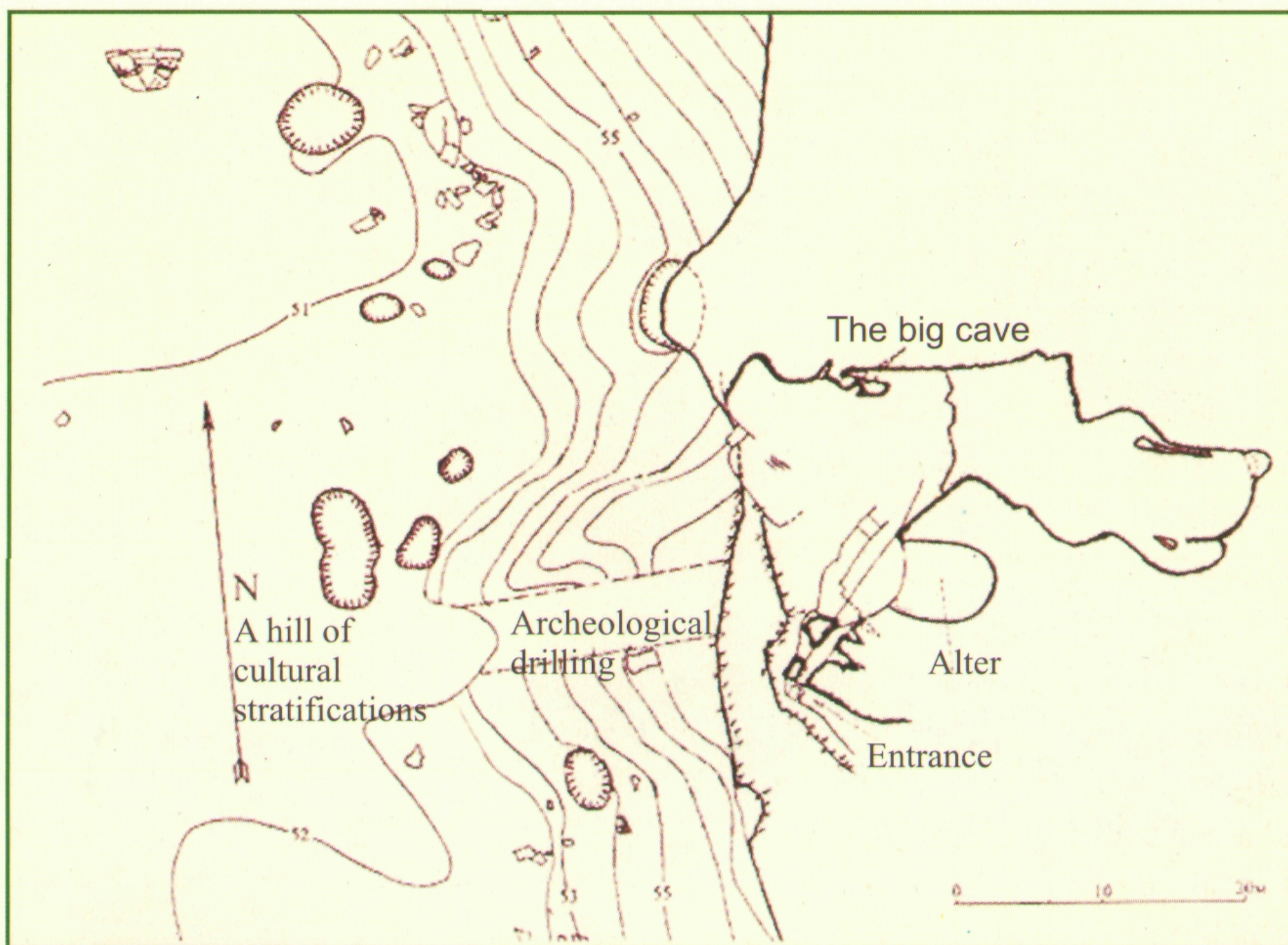
The rock temples, alters, underground galleries and halls on the shore of the half-dried river point the attention to the history of the Thracian-Getae hero, – a wise man, a healer, a high priest, a king and god Zalmoksis. He draws and keeps the attention of the ancient authors from Herodotus (483–425 B.C.) To the early medieval writers in the VI–VII century A.C. While describing the campaign of the Persian king Darius against the Schytians (514 B.C.),



Sample 18. Presumable image of Zalmoksis on the jug of the village Borovo, Ruse.



Sample 19. The alter of "Badjaliata".



Sample 20. Plan of "Badjaliata" and the archeological structures beneath it.

Herodotus claimed, that before reaching Istar (The Danube) had conquered The Getae. They showed greatest resistance, therefore they were nominated for the bravest and fairest of the Thracian (Herodotus, 4. 95, 1). The Getae believed in the immortality (one of the reasons for their incomparable bravery) and they did not think, that they die, but that after death they went to the God Zalmoksis, also called Gebeleizis. Every five years they chose by lot one of them as a messenger with breves and asks for their needs to Salmoksis. For this purpose they put three pikes, over which they threw the messenger from a height. If he dies pierced, they believe that the god is favorable, but if he does not die the blame is put on him and another messenger is chosen. These same Thracians threw arrows to the sky against the god of lights and thunders, in belief that there was no other god than Salmoksis. Apart from that Herodotus found out from the Greek settlers on the Black sea coast, that he (Salmoksis) was a slave of the famous philosopher and mathematician Pythagorus (the second half of the VI century B.C.) on the island Samos. Armed with a lot of knowledge after he had been released from Pythagorus, Salmoksis got rich and finally he went back to his compatriots, where he stands out for his erudition and a fine way of life. He built himself a hall (andreon), in which he received the noble The Getae, he feasted them and taught them that neither he, nor his table-companions, nor their successors will ever die, but after the death they will go to

a sublime place, where they will be buried in luxury. In the same time he made them to build him an underground lodging, where he descended and lived there separated from the world in a full isolation for three years. The Thracians grieved for him and lamented for him, but in the fourth year Salmoksis appeared and stimulated them to think, that he is immortal. After this digression Herodotus explained how Darius and his army went through the Danube.

Similarly, but a briefer story told us Strabo, who lived between 63–13 B.C. (Strabo. 7. 3. 5). There are some nuances, for instance the rambles of Zalmoksis in Egypt, where he studied the secrets of the priests, and also the claim that the king of The Getae took him as a co-ruler, because he could proclaim the will of the gods. In the beginning he was a high priest of the god, but then he is called a god. Finally he moved into a cave, called “Kogaion” (Κωγαίονον), unreachable for others, which is located on the shore of a river with the same name. Here he inhabits without any contact with people, except for the king, to whom he gave the will of The Gods. This custom was preserved by The Getae until the time of Strabo (I century B.C.), because their kings had always advisors, who were called gods. For instance at the time of Ceaser (59–44 B.C.) on the post of advisor of Burebista (the king of The Getae) stood Dekeneis, who predicted the will of the gods. This Dekeneis also gathered knowledge in Egypt and later, alike Zalmoksis, alone proclaimed himself for a god.

The famous philosopher Platon also wrote about Zalmoksis, but he presented him in a different light through the words of Socrates (Platon. I harm. 155–158). During the march of the Athenians against Potideis in 432 B.C. Socrates met a Thracian doctor,



Sample 21. A view to “Kirindjika”.



Sample 22. Thracian ceramics from “Badjaliata”.

who believed in the immortality of the soul and following his god Zalmoksis, he did not cure the body without curing the soul and the opposite. This legend interested also the Gothic historian Jorddnes in the VI century A.C. (Jorddnes. Get. 39–41). He claimed, that Zalmoksis preached “a wonderful philosophy”, which ruled in Dacia, Thracia and Moesia, but he mistook the chronology, when placing before him “the educated men” Zevtas and Dekeneis. After he told the story of Dekeneis, who was received by Burebista as an advisor and took almost king power, Jorddnes claimed, that he was inherited on this post by Komosika. As a king–priest Komosika was inherited by Chorilius. These facts together with the rest witness for a stable priest caste among the Getae. Its beginning is laid by Zalmoksis, but he has followers, who centuries on end were active in the low–Danube lands.

A short summary of the story with Zalmoksis (borrowed from Herodotus and Strabo) also left us Iamblich (died around 330 A.C.) In his work “For life of Pythagor” (Iamblichus. Vita Pythagor. 173). Later, but still more detailed, the story of Zalmoksis was told by Porphyrius in a work, also devoted to the life of Pythagor (Porphyrius. Vita Pythagor. 14–15). He again retold Herodotus, but he put original passages into it, which were missing in the works of his forerunners. Particular interest deserves his

statement, that when Zalmoksis was born he was put on a bear's hide, that the Thracians called "zalmos": from here came his name Zalmoksis. Among the late authors our attention is held also by Hessychius, who worked in the V century A.C., he gave three meanings of the name Zalmoksis: Cronus (the god of Zeus), dance and song (Hessychius. 14). Diodorus devoted also attention to Zalmoksis, who claimed, that he had received the laws from the goddess Hestia–Westa, daughter of Cronus (Diodorus. 1, 94, 2). Generally, during over 1100 years (from the V century B.C. Until the VI century A.C.) The Thracian–Getae god Zalmoksis was ceaselessly to the attention of writers, philosophers, theologians and annalists. This, entirely natural, provoked serious scientific interest for his personality, who was a subject of scores of articles, studies and monographs. However, in this case we are not so interested in the cult to Zalmoksis in its huge dimensions, but rather in his remarks in the cave temples and the rock sanctuaries, platforms and alters.

From Herodotus until present times it is payed attention that in the V century B.C. differences in the religious beliefs and practices of the Thracian tribes are registered. It is reasonably emphasized on the specifics of the cult to Zalmoksis among The Getae from Northeastern Bulgaria, which at least in the beginning had no analogy in the rest of the Thracian world. Besides Zalmoksis was the Thracian deity, that the authentic written sources most directly connected with the cave. Moreover, his cave was definitely connected with The Getae and there are no facts, which to transfer it to other Thracian lands. Exactly through the hearth of The Getae kingdom, at about only 50 km from their



Sample 23. Finds from "Badjaliata".

capital Hellis (near the village Sveshtari, Isperih) flows the river Taban, on whose shores is the rock cult complex with the central sanctuary "Badjaliata". There are really no other Thracian sanctuaries like these in the Bulgarian land as those on the river Taban, where the cave is a definite dominant in which almost all cult practices are concentrated. Thus, there has been a discussion since long ago where exactly is located the river Kogaion (Κωγαίονον), on whose shore Zalmoksis' cave of the same name stands. The idea prevails, that it is somewhere in Moldova, but somehow the fact is missed, that Herodotus described the story with Zalmoksis, the cave and the mysteries, when he spoke of The Getae southern from the Danube. After the army of Darius crossed the river (actually entered into present Moldova, where the cave Kogaion is searched), he described other stories and did not go back to the cult to Zalmoksis. Generally, "the father of the history" totally definite situated the presence of Zalmoksis in today's Northeastern Bulgaria. And if we believe Strabo, that Zalmoksis was in an unbreakable connection with the king of The Getae (to whom he gave continually the will of gods, personally or through king's servants), so the cave "Kogaion" should not be too far away from the king's residence. I have mentioned, that it is already known, that king of The Getae Hellis was by Sveshtari, which is too far away from Moldova and quite close to the cave temples on the river Taban. In this background it is remarkable, that southern from the Danube, the territories, inhabited by The Getae, the monuments around the river Taban are for the present the only one expressive rock cave cult complex from the Thracian Epoch. Furthermore, as a result of the archeological



Sample 24. Hellenic ceramics under "Badjaliata".

researches, the gained finds, ceramics and coins, it is obvious, that this complex and particularly the sanctuary near the cave “Badjalia” functioned almost without interruption from VI–V A.C. Until the III–IV A.C. In this sense the archeological realities are totally connected with the written sources (Herodotus V B.C., Platon from IV B.C., Strabo from I B.C., Diodorus from I A.C., Clementus Alexandrius from II A.C. (Clementus Alexandrius. Stromat. 4, 8, 57–59), the Passional of st. Dasius from IV A.C.), in which we follow a stable cult in the time and space. Moreover, the authors in question without exception about the cult not in a historical context, as something past, but as practices, done in the time, in which they lived. Still, at this stage it would be too forced and extremely speculative to bound ourselves with the statement, that the river Taban and the cave temple “Badjaliata” can be identified with the river and the cave “Kogaion”, where Zalmoksis lived. From the context of some of the written sources, still, the conviction has been confirmed that the cult to Zalmoksis and the concomitant cult practices and mysteries continues in time and space centuries after the hero of The Getae leaved the earth life. It is already mentioned, that the inheritor of Zalmoksis and a supreme priest in the time of Strabo was Dekeneis, and Jorddnes gave us a whole list with supreme priests, his followers. There are even clues (particularly in Platon, Jorddnes and Climentus Alexandrius), that a caste was formed from priests and healers, which assumed a multiplication of the cult and the practices and rituals connected to it. Having in mind the special place of the river and the cave in the life and philosophy of Zalmoksis, then this binary system seems to be sacred and becomes decisive for the cult practices of his followers for centuries on end. In this context, namely, the cave temples, the sanctuaries, the alters, and the platforms on the river Taban can be looked at. Even if this is not the half–mythical center of Zalmoksis “Kogaion”, the structure of the rock monuments harmonizes with the descriptions of Herodotus, Strabo and their followers. Together with the rest this leads us to the



Sample 25. Roman ceramics from “Badjaliata”.

possibility that by Taban was built one of the cult centers of The Getae, which copied the structures and rituals in "Kogaion". Not only were the monuments by Taban chronologically identical with the appearance, the widespread and the fading of the cult to Zalmoksis in the Balkan's Northeast, but they re-created in a high degree the major stages and elements of its ritualism. In this sense the big cave "Badjaliata" with the alter, the limited access with door remind of the andreon of Zalmoksis. It is at a high, visible place and is a real dominant among the other caves in the region. The controlled access obviously aimed, alike the andreon of Zalmoksis, that only chosen men went in there. In the cave are also registered fireplaces and ceramics, and the impressive alter near it was obviously a place for sacrifices. It was already mentioned, that right under the alter, in the foot of "Badjaliata", a thick cultural layer is piled up – a real hill from broken ceramic utensils, animal bones, coins, ornaments and parts of human skeletons. Most probably they have been thrown into the abyss for centuries, because, excluding the single monuments from the eneolith and the late Bronze Age, the ceramics and the finds, they are dated basically between VI B.C. and II–III A.C. However, the ancient authors repeatedly mentioned for chosen men (after the words of Herodotus "table-companions"), who gathered in the andreon, where according to Hellanic "...offer sacrifices and make feasts".



Sample 26. The style of the temple under "Kirindjika".

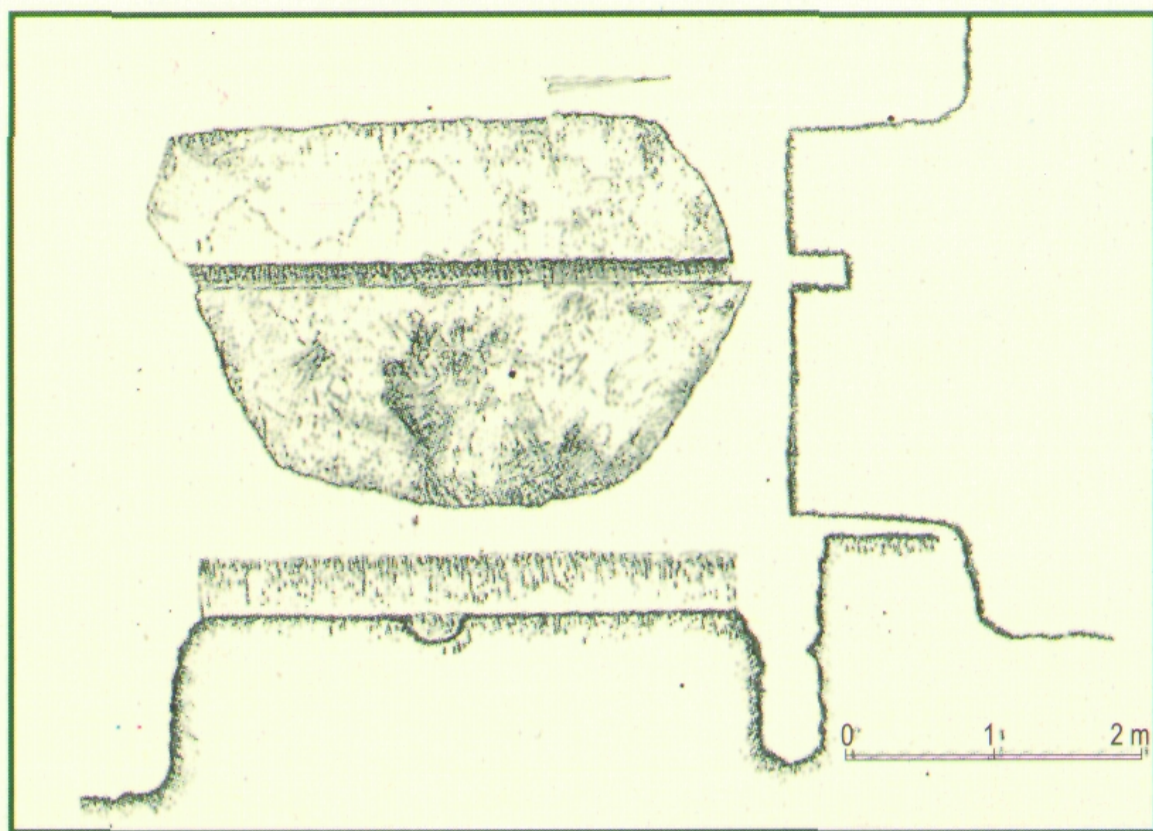
In a direct connection with the andreon "Badjaliata" is the rock throne in the foot of the alter and right in front of the original hill, piled up from the ritually broken utensils, as result of feasts and sacrifices (sample 10, 20, 27). There by the sitting in the symbolic throne spirit of Zalmoksis could observe the ceremonies in the alter, and literally in his feet in front of the throne fall the victims. The raise of Zalmoksis as a supreme priest, co-ruler, king and god made explainable and obligatory also his enthroning – a main privilege of the kings and supreme deities. However, according to E. Gergiev the name Salmoksis (as Herodotus himself wrote it) is translated more like a ruler, king, rather than bear's hide (zalmos), as claimed by Porphyrius with a great delay after seven centuries. The practices thrones to be cut, is registered also in other Thracian rock sanctuaries in the Bulgarian lands. Alike "Badjaliata" they are usually oriented to the south or the east. Probably it is all about a regional tradition in this epoch, because rock thrones, connected with sanctuaries and accepted as an emanation of the divine power are registered in Anatolia.

The cult platform with the perfectly formed channel north–south in an unique way adds to the sacred complex around the andreon "Badjaliata", with which it is in a direct visual connection (samples 11, 28). It was already pointed out the important role, that Zelmoksis had at the horizon of The Getae. Strabo himself gives to Zalmoksis–Cronus a great skill in the "heaven works", gained in the time of his training by Pythagorus (philosopher and mathematician) and in the meetings with the egyptian priests. Astronomical knowledge, according to Jorddnes, had also Dekeneis – a follower of Zalmoksis. That is why I assume that the so called cult platform opposite of "Badjaliata" served for astronomical observations, related with the astrological practices of the

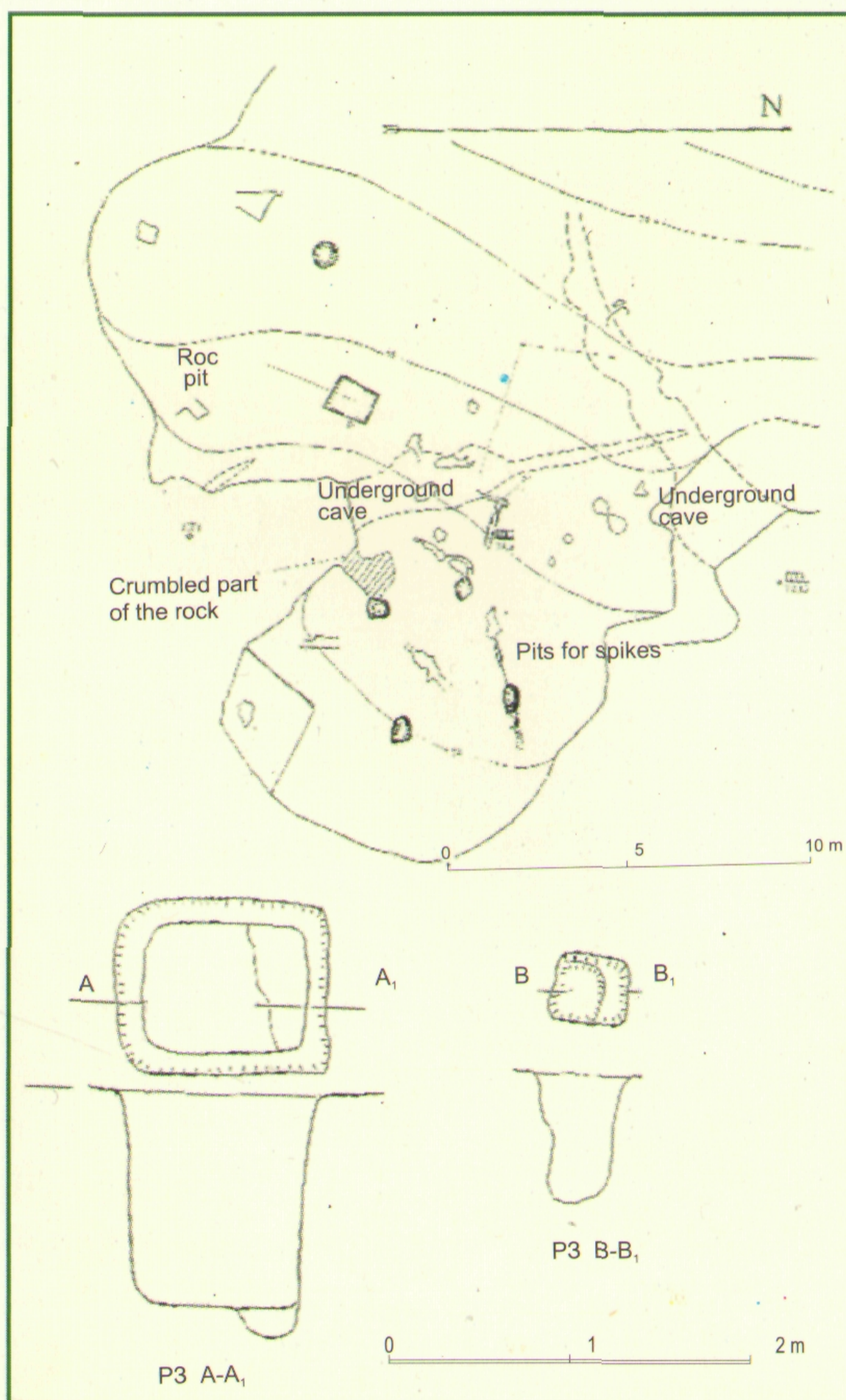
worshippers of Zalmoksis. Indeed do the cycles, related with the disappearance of Zalmoksis in the underground cave and his appearance, as also the periodical sacrifices of chosen messengers, enforce a deep look in the vault of heaven and complicated astronomical calculations. The first observations have been already done for the heaven



Sample 27. Drawing of the rock throne.



Sample 28. Drawing of the cult platform.



Sample 29. Drawing of the rock cult pit.

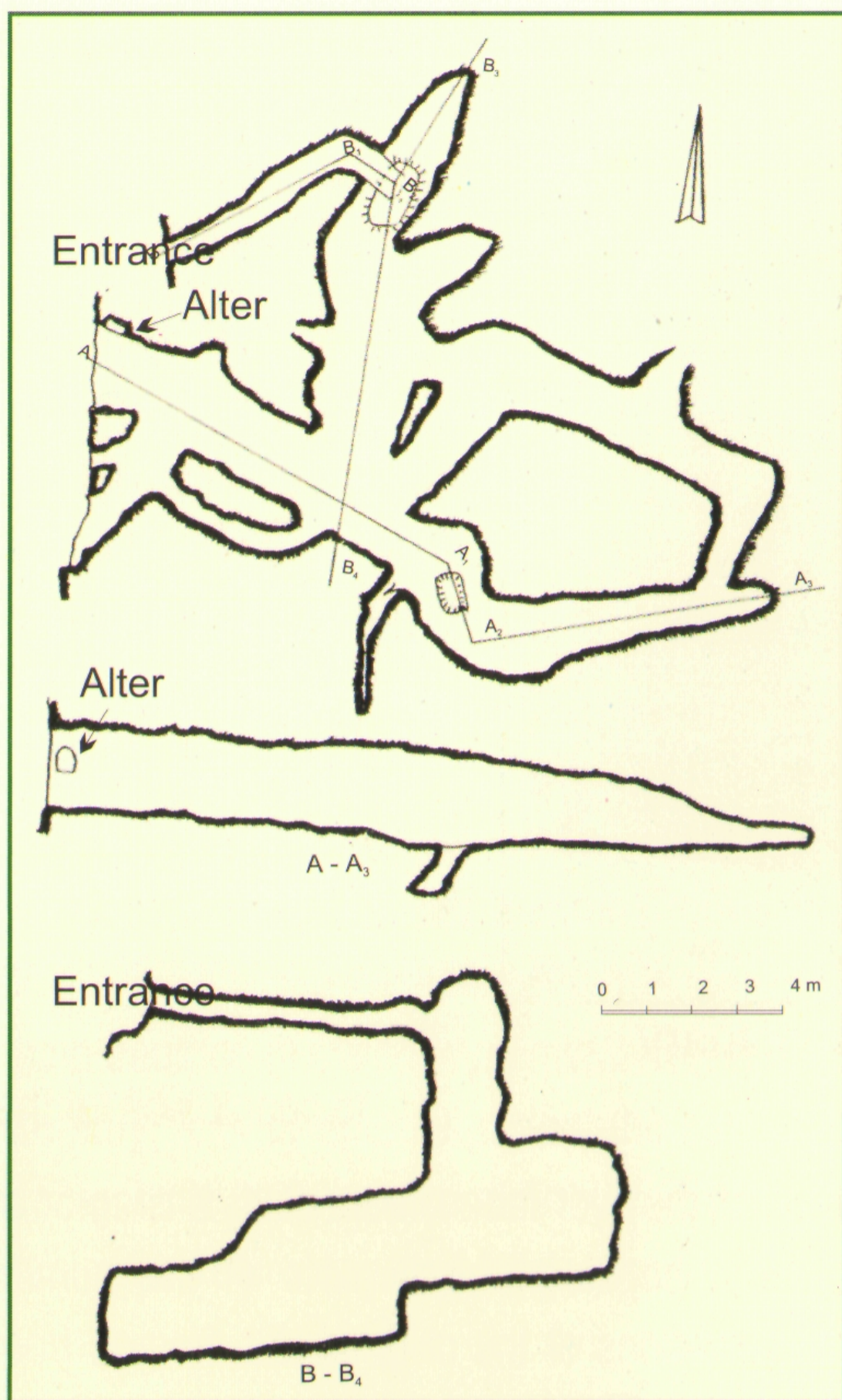
symbolic in the archeological objects in Sborianovo (the capital with the king's necropolis of The Getae", Mostovo (Plovdiv), the nearby sanctuary by the village Hrabrovo (Balchik) (the channels are analogous with those by "Badjaliata") and monuments of The Getae in Romania and Moldova. One has even identified Thracian rock observatories (Mostovo, Hrabrovo), to which the rock platform opposite of "Badjaliata" can be possibly added. Therefore, it is reasonable, that recently O. Popov has paid attention to the fact, that in the lands of The Getae and particularly in northeastern Bulgaria "... *From now on objects of the archeoastronomy will be found and interpreted*". I think that the monuments around "Badjaliata" in full strength reply to such expectations. The fourth structure, forming the rock cult center "Badjaliata" is the rock cult pit (grave?), situated above a small cave, eastern from the alter of the temple (sample 12, 29, 30). We are tempted to accept the hypothesis, that it is a symbolic image of the underground home (the cave "Kogaion"), which Zalmoksis built, while he preached in the andreon. There he spent four years and so he proved his immortality. From texts of the ancient authors however, we

keep the impression, that the cave “Kogaion” was distant from the andreon and inaccessible for the common Thracian and also for the chosen from the circle of the educated men. That is why we could observe the rock pit eastern from “Badjaliata” possibly as a symbolic or real grave of a supreme priest or messenger, ritually mortified in front of the alter of the sanctuary. But it is more probable, that it is one of the tombs, in which cult objects were laid, which were as a rule near the rock sanctuary, as in the case by Tatul.

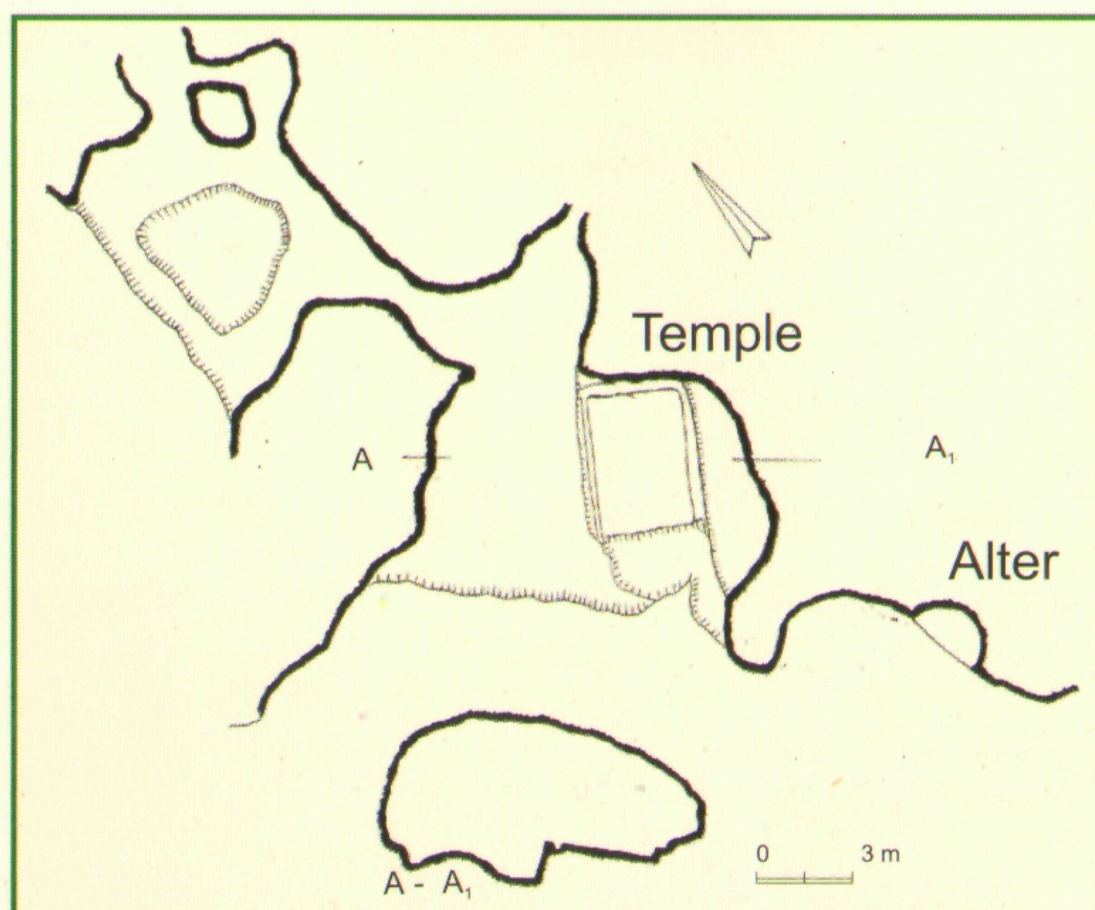
And still, which of the cave structures on the river Taban can be interpreted as the cave “Kogaion”?! It is excepted, that this would be “Badjaliata”, not only because it was already loaded with the symbolic of the “andreon”, but also because it is widely open to the river, accessible and notably visible from everywhere. Finally, the approach to it happens after a real and symbolic ascent to the peak of the rock garland. On the contrary, the falling in to the cave “Kogaion” is a descent to a secret place where Zalmoksis “...disappeared for the Thracians and went down in his underground home, where he spent three years” (Herodotus, 4. 94–96). On the background of this description and the archeological realities on the river Taban with a greater grounds for an interpretation of the “underground home” (according to Herodotus) or “the inaccessible cavel (near the river Kogaion according to Strabo) can pretend the cave sanctuary “Kirindjika”. The entrance itself of the long and narrow gallery is really hard to discover, even secret, and the access to the big underground cave with an alter niche (samples 21, 31) is a continuous and hard “descent”. Men with



Sample 30. Rock cult pit.



Sample 31. Plan of the "labyrinth" above "Kirindjika".



Sample 32. Plan of "Kirindjika".

good physique could definitely enter it, who probably did sacrifices and rituals in front of the small altar near the only one enlightened corner of the cave. It was probably rarely visited, because the cultural stratifications in it are limited by ten fragments of Thracian and antique ceramics. The foot of this "hidden" and extremely hard accessible "cave house" was far more actively inhabited, for which witness the variety of fragments of ceramics (Thracian, Hellenic and Roman) and animal bones. But they are a result of the raised on this place (under the rock garland) rectangular temple (samples 26, 32). It is built on a preformed rock platform with channels, in which its walls are moored. The scattered around the rocks antique bricks presume, that the temple in the foot of the "hidden cave house" is constructed in the Roman Epoch. The access to the underground hall obviously was limited, but the development of the cult in the time let to the construction of a sanctuary, which was visited by the Thracians untill the III-IV A.C. Therefore, the translation of "Kogaion" as "sacred" presumes sanctuary, near which a semicircle open altar has been formed (samples 32, 33). At this place no archeological researches were made, but the various fragments of Thracian and Hellenic (basically amphoras) and Roman ceramics from the deep treasure-hunters' excavations presume similarity with the sanctuary "Badjaliata".



Sample 33. The alter near the sanctuary in "Kirirndjika".

It is mostly difficult to be defined the place of the rock sanctuaries near Kutlovitsa (samples 2, 14) and V. Levski (samples 2, 15) in the cult complex on the river Taban. They border the central sanctuaries "Badjaliata" (the andreon) and "Kirindjika" (the cave home of the god) and they are original alters, marking the beginning and the end of the sacred territory on the middle-stream of the river Taban.

In conclusion for the

remarks of the cult to Zalmoksis in the region of the river Taban, respectively the region of Durostorum–Silistra: Undoubtedly we must begin with the parts of the human skeletons (probably two), found by the excavations of the original hill, formed from sacrifices in the foot of "Badjaliata". It is not excluded that they are a result of human sacrifices, which the Thracian–Getae did only by ceremonies, devoted to Zalmoksis. It has been already said the supposal, that the messenger to Zalmoksis, chosen according to Herodotus by a lot, was thrown from priests namely from a high rock. In the foot he fell on pikes, held by other priests. The passion of St. Dasius, who was slayed in Durostorum (Silistra) on the 20 of November 304 witnesses in a plain way about remarks of this ritual, practiced centuries after the descriptions of Herodotus. The author, who wrote around the middle of the IV century, wrote how in the beginning of the IV century in the military circle in Durostorum in a mostly solemn (more solemn than all others) way the feast of Cronus was fete. Among the citizens a lot was drawn and the one, who won was dressed up in king's clothes. Alike Cronus himself he appeared among the people, receiving the full power. During 30 days, pursued by a draft of soldiers (like guards) in a festival environment he satisfied his caprices. On this

occasion we should remind once again the statement of Hessychius that the other meaning of the name Zalmoksis was "Cronus, dance and song" (Hessychius. 14). When 30 days were over, on the very feast of Cronus, the chosen was taken as a sacrifice to the god by a ritual slay. (Sample 35). It was already paid attention to the fact, that the feast of Cronus in Durostorum is a remark of the continuing in the region cult to Zalmoksis, which according to Herodotus, was also pursued by human sacrifices. We also say, that the identification of Zalmoksis with Cronus is registered by the ancient authors, particularly by Hessychius and Diodorus. Indirectly for this witnesses also Herodotus, who claimed, that the worshipers of Zalmoksis threw arrows against the god of the thunders and lights, believing that there is no other god but theirs. The god of the thunders is Zeus, and it is known, that Cronus was the more ancient god, who entered a battle with his son Zeus. Probably The Getae did not accept the Greek version for the win of Zeus against Cronus and they continued the battle with the god of the Hellenes. However, the contamination of Cronus with Zalmoksis is obvious and the long tradition of the cult and mysteries, related to Zalmoksis in Durostorum until the IV century. It is symptomatic, that the cave temples and rock sanctuaries on the river Taban have been located at only 25–30 km eastern from Durostorum in the feet of the main road Durostorum–Marcianopolis. It is identical with the present road Silistra–Varna near which the big hill necropolis stands (sample 2, 34). Finally, by archeological researches under "Badjaliata" and by the terrain travels to the next rock temple "Kirindjika" it turned out, that the latest ceramics, coins and finds are from III–IVb. (Sample 9, 25). There are no coins and fragments of utensils from the V–VI



Sample 34. Hill necropolis above "Badjaliata".

century, although then the neighboring fortresses to the village Pop Rusanovo were inhabited most actively (only kilometers away from the Thracian cave temples by "Kirindjika", Kutlovitsa and Voinovo). It is also remarkable, that in the next dry river valley in the V–VI century scores of rock churches and monasteries were cut, but the dry river valley of Taban, despite the more favorable chances for rock building, were skipped by the Christians. Generally, the life in the sanctuary "Badjaliata" and the neighboring structures stopped all of a sudden after the beginning of the IV century A.C. And this is identical with the imposing of the Christianity in this region. Obviously the cave temples and the areas around them on the river Taban, related to pagan rituals and mysteries, were considered to be desecrated places. This attitude was strengthened by the works like the passional of the local martyr st. Dasius. Moreover, we bump into clues for human sacrifices, which were considered to be an unforgivable sin for the Christians. For this reason namely the life around the sanctuaries stopped and they became desolate forever. *But, the memory of Zalmoksis is modified and preserved under the form of the symbolic kukerski feast processions, practiced in the Silistra are until present days.*



Sample 35. The slay of st. Dasius from Dorostorum according to a miniature in Monology of Vasilus II (the beginning of the IX century).

Basic literature for the theme

- Г. Атанасов. Към историческата география на Южна Добруджа. – Добруджа, 4, 1987.
Г. Атанасов. Ранновизантийски скални църкви и манастири в Южна Добруджа. – Археология, 3, 1991.
Г. Атанасов с кол. История на Алфатар. Варна, 1994.
Г. Атанасов. Скални култови паметници в Добруджа. Светилища, храмове, манастири. Силистра, 2004.
Ив. Венедиков. Медното гумно на прабългарите. София, 1983.
Вл. Георгиев. Траките и техния език. София, 1977.
Д. Гергова. Сборяново. Священная земля гетов. София, 2004.
Д. Кацаров, Д. Дечев. Извори за старата история на Тракия и Македония. София, 1939.
Ив. Маразов. Мит, ритуал и изкуство у траките. София, 1992.
В. Найденова. Скалните светилища в Тракия. – В: Поселищни проучвания в Тракия. Ямбол, 1980.
Д. Попов. Залмоксис. Религия и общество на траките. София, 1989.
Д. Попов. Богът с многото имена. София, 1995.
Л. Симеонова. Житията на Дазий и марцианополските мъченици като извор за историята на гетските земи през къдната античност. – В: Североизточна България. Древност и съвремие. София, 1985.
Ал. Стоев. Тракийското скално светилище „Белинташ“ край с. Мостово, Пловдивски окръг модел на древна слънчева обсерватория. – Интердисциплинарни изследвания, XVII, 1990.
С. Торбатов. Неизвестно тракийско скално светилище в Южна Добруджа. – Археология, 1–2, 2004.
В. Тъпкова–Заимова. Сведения за средновековни кукерски игри в Силистренско. – В: Езиковедско–етнографски изследвания в памет на ак. Ст. Романски. София, 1960.
В. Фол. Скалата, конят и огнят. Ранната тракийска обредност. София, 1990.
H. Daicoviciu. Il tempo calendario dacico di Sarmizegetuza. – Dacia, 4, 1960.
R. Pillinger. Das Martyrium des Heiligen Dasius. Wien, 1988.
S. Torbatov. The Roman Road Durostorum–Marcianopolis. – Archaeologia Bulgarica, 1, 2000.

Author: Dr. Georgi Atanasov
E-mail: geoatal@abv.bg

Artist-photographers:
R. Dimitrov, D. Iordanov, G. Atanasov
Technical editor: Vera Petrova
Translator Anna Todorova

ISBN-10: 954-759-130-4



ISBN-13: 9789547591301 >

*Printed on the
presses of*
RIT^{bg}

Silistra
2006



3
RIT
bg